WEB OF STEEL

By CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY
Father and Son

Here Is a Powerful Story of Failure and Sacrifice and Love and Courage and Success

CHARACTER TEST

CONFIDENCE and good-nature are easy for folks who are already prosperous and successful. The true strength of a man's character is revealed, however, in adversity. Tear the foundation from beneath one who has always enjoyed advantages of wealth and position, and see if he has the backbone to conquer evil days—to rise above circumstances and win. In "Web of Steel" we have the story of a man whose foundation is destroyed. His fight to rebuild it makes the novel. It is not merely entertaining fiction; it is a piece of inspiring literature. We feel sure all of our readers will enjoy this Cyrus Towsend Brady serial.

THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER I.

—1—

Love of Woman.

If meetings only lived up to their anticipations, life would be a succession of startling climaxes. It had been some months since Meade had seen Helen Illingworth. He had dreamed of meeting her every day and had pictured the meeting differently and more rapturously after every letter. As a matter of fact the whole thing was casual and ordinary to the last degree. It always is.

Doctor Severence, a retired physician, who was vice president and financial man, and Curtiss, the chief engineer of the bridge company, were hard upon Miss Illingworth's heels as she stepped down from the car to the station platform. He saw her, as it were, surrounded by prosaic men. The woman he loved got the same welcome and the same handshake as her father and the other two men. It was not until big Abbott, who had been belated by some sudden demand of work, came sweeping down the platform to engage the attention of the men that the anxious Meade had a moment with the girl herself.

Now Helen Illingworth had also been seeing visions, so that she had been as disappointed as he. The only real satisfaction that either of them could take in the situation lay in the fact that the other was there. It was midsummer and the girl was dressed in some light, filmy fabric which well became her radiant beauty. Meade could look at a bit of structural steel work and tell you all about it. All that he could have told you about the dress she wore was that it was exquisitely appropriate, but it never occurred to him that with a great price to a great artist Helen Illingworth had obtained that look of delightful simplicity.

The gown was not wasted on Meade, she decided, as she caught his rapturous glance. She had never looked lovelier. She was not a fragile, ethereal woman; quite the reverse. That was one of ten thousand things Meade liked about her. She could do all those athletic and practical things that modern young women can do and she could do them well.

Meade was intensely practical and efficient. He could do all of those things himself and many more and he liked to do them, and that is one reason why he had been attracted to her; yet not for that alone did he love her. On that soft summer afternoon she looked as subtly delicate as every man would at one time or another have the woman he loves appear, and as far removed from things strenuous as if in another world! He was wearing the rough clothes, flannel shirt, khaki trousers, heavy shoes and leggings which were his habitual use at work. Contrasted with her filmy and delicately colored fabric his well-worn olive-drab habiliments stood forth hideously. That is, he thought so, and the contrast somehow seemed typical of the difference between them as he considered her.

There was the careless insouciance of conscious power in the bearing of the engineer which differentiated him from most of the men with whom she had been thrown in contact during her life. The International Bridge was the biggest thing of the kind the Martlet company or any other American structural plant had ever undertaken. It had been a constant topic of conversation wherever her father was. She had heard all about it, and although, strictly speaking, the bridge was the work of Meade, Sr., yet she always identified it with Meade, Jr. There was a feeling in her mind that it was her bridge and that, through him, she commanded it. She was a supremely assured and enjoyable confident young lady, yet with the man by her side she experienced a passing sense of uneasiness, such as one might conceive the butterfly would feel in the presence of a steam hammer.

They were as awkward and constrained when left to themselves as if one had not been all over the world on man's job for a decade and the other had not crossed it among the nicest girls of the land for half as many years. And with thoughts burning, passionate, and words embarrassingly torrential at hand to give them utterance, they only spoke commonplaces!

"How is the bridge getting along?" asked the girl, repeating her father's words of a few minutes before, as these two fell behind the others marching down the long platform, while the maid standing by the private car with the porter looked curiously after the moving group and wondered if that gray-green, long-legged young man was the reason for the New York gown!

"It's doing splendidly," was the answer, and even with his heart full of the girl by his side whom he longed to clasp in his arms but did not even dare touch the hem of her garment, some little enthusiasm came into his voice. "It is the greatest bridge that was ever erected," he said.

"How you love it," said the girl.

Did Meade love the bridge? Ah, there could be no doubt as to that. He had studied its growth hour by hour. As the great steel web rose, his

He Lingered About It.

heart expanded with it. He took pride in it even more when they began to push the suspended span across the river on the outer end of the completed cantilever, toward its fellow rising on the other side. He lingered about it when the rest of the workaday world which was concerned with it had withdrawn to rest. Frequently late in the night he had arisen and had left the sheet-iron shack he occupied near the work (for the topography of the land and the course of the river had determined the location of the bridge far from any town), and in the moonlight he had gazed bewitched by the great web of steel, all its mighty tracery delicately silvered, faintly outlined, lacelike, lofty, lifted high into the heavens.

He fell into a little reverie for a brief moment from which she recalled him.

"Well?" she asked.

"Yes, naturally," he found himself saying in a conventional tone of voice, "it means a great deal to me. My father—"

"Oh, your father," she began indifferently, although she knew and liked the great engineer.

"It is his crowning work and—"

"Your beginning."

"It is not in me, or in any engineer, to begin where my father left off," he said. "But this will count a great deal, because through father's kindness I had some hand—"

"I believe you did it all," interrupted the girl.

He broke into sudden laughter, and his merriment had that boyish ring she liked. He seemed to think that was a sufficient answer to that statement, for he went on quickly.

"How long shall you stay?"

And in spite of himself he could not keep his anxiety out of his voice.

"I think father's going on to the city sometime tomorrow—probably in the morning."

Meade's face fell.

"So soon as that?"

"I will try to persuade him to stay longer. I've seen lots of bridges built but never one like the International, and I should enjoy standing by and watching you work."

"I don't do the work. Abbott does that, and the men, of course."

"Your work is the work that makes possible and profitable the labor of the others," she answered. "You plan, you lead, the rest only follow. By the way, father told me to ask you and Mr. Abbott to dine with us tonight in the car."

Meade's mood changed into positive gloom.

"I can't," he said dejectedly. "I haven't any clothes, neither has Abbott. We left our dress suits behind us when we came into the wilderness to work."

"Oh," she laughed. "What difference does that make? Come just as you are. It will be a relief. I like you that way. I get so tired of black and white," she went on quickly to prevent him from taking advantage of her incautious admission.

"Hang the clothes," said the man, radiant once more in that admission, "since you will allow it, I will come with what I can rake up. But you'll have to tell me which fork to use. I have almost forgotten out here in the wilderness."

"It isn't six months since you were at our house."

"Six months! It's a thousand years," he went on, "and I'm going to take you out on the bridge after dinner. It's great at any time. It's the most magnificent sight on earth even now, but in the moonlight—there it is now," he pointed as the little group walked past the station which had hid the view and the great structure suddenly was revealed to them.

The four men ahead had stopped and stood silent. There was something awe-inspiring and tremendous about the great, black, outreaching, far-extending arms of steel. The first sight of it always gave the beholder a little shock. It was so huge, so massive, so grandly majestic, and withal so airy, seen against the impressive background of deep gorge and palisaded wall and far-off mountains. So ether-borne was it in its perfect proportion that even dull and stupid people—and none of these were that—felt its overpowering presence. Meade and the girl stopped too. After one glance at the bridge, she looked at him. And that was typical. For the first time he was not at the moment aware of, or immediately responsive to, her glance. And that, too, was typical. She noted this with a pang of jealousy.

"You love the bridge," she said softly.

He straightened up and threw his head back and looked at her.

"I thought so," he said simply—"until today, but now"—he stopped again.

"But now?" she asked.

"I have just learned what love really is and the lesson has not been taught me by a bridge," he answered directly.

Yet Bertram Meade, the younger, did truly love the bridge which he had seen grow from the placing of the first shoe—the great steel base on top of the pier which carries the whole structure—to the completion of the soaring cantilever reaching out to meet its companion on the other side—the great International, which was to be the tie that bound, with web of steel, two great countries which lay breast to breast; already in touch save for the mighty river that flowed between them.

By no means would Meade, the younger, have been charged with the great responsibilities of the bridge had it not been for his exhaustive preparation and wide experience. To a thorough technical training at Harvard, in the Lawrence Scientific school, had been added a substantial record of achievement. A fine bridge which he had erected in faraway Burma, triumphantly achieving the design despite all sorts of difficulties, had attracted the attention of old Colonel Illingworth, the president of the Martlet Bridge company.

He had kept the young man under his eye for a long time. When he commissioned his father, Bertram Meade, Sr., to prepare the plans for the great International, the most-sought-for and famous of bridges, he had noted with satisfaction that the older man, who stood first among bridge engineers on the continent, had associated with himself his son. Meade, Jr., had recently returned from South America, where he had again shown his mettle. The two worked together in the preparation of the designs for what was to be the crown and triumph of the older man's life, the most stupendous of all the cantilever bridges in the world.

The great engineer had a high idea of his only son's ability. He was willing to proclaim it, to maintain it, and defend it against all comers except himself. When the two wills clashed, he recognized but one way, his own. The relations between the two were lovely but not ideal. There was leadership not partnership, direction rather than co-operation. The knowledge and experience of the boy—for so he loved to call him—where of course nothing compared to those of his father. When, in discussing moot points, the younger man had been unconvinced by the calculations of the elder, he had been laughed to scorn in a good-natured way. His carefully set forth objections, even in serious matters, had been overborne generally, and by triumphant calculations of his own the father had re-enforced himself in his conclusions; and the more strongly because of the opposition.

Young Meade's position was rather anomalous. He had no direct supervision of the construction. He was there as resident engineer representing his father. He had welcomed the position because it gave him an opportunity to see from the very beginning the erection of what was to be the greatest cantilever bridge the feet of the world had ever trod upon, the wheels of the world had ever rolled across. He had followed with the utmost care, constantly reporting the progress to his father, every step taken under the superintendence of Abbott, a man of great practical ability as an erector, but of much less capacity as a scientific designer or office engineer. Meade had watched its daily growth with the closest attention. Like every other man in similar case, the work had got into his blood. It had become a part of his life. He loved the bridge; yet more he loved Helen Illingworth.

CHAPTER II.

The Witness for the Defense.

One of the pleasant evidences of the possession of riches is in the luxury of a private car. Although Colonel Illingworth was personally a man of simple tastes as became an old campaigner, there was no appointment that wit could devise or that money could buy which was lacking to make his private car either more comfortable or more luxurious in its napery, glass, china and silver, the dining table needed not to apologize to any other anywhere. The colonel was most punctilious in dressing his part and Meade and Abbott were both scrubbed to within an inch of their lives, but, climbing about the bridge, their hands were scratched, roughened, stained and torn. Aside from that, Meade was certainly most presentable, and old Abbott, in spite of his indifference to such matters, looked the able and powerful man he was.

The conversation at dinner was at first light and frivolous.

"I'm lost," began Abbott, "overpowered with all this silver and glass and china."

"Yes," laughed Meade, "we should have brought along our granite ware and tincups, then we would be free from the dreadful fear that we are going to drop something or break something."

"You can break anything you like," said the colonel with heavy pleasantry, "so long as the bridge stands."

"And that is going to be forever, isn't it, Mr. Meade?" asked Helen quickly.

"I don't think anything built by man will survive quite that long," he answered as much to her father and the others as to her, "but this gives every promise of lasting its time."

"You know," observed Curtiss, "there was some question in my mind about these big compression members. When I first studied your father's drawings, I wondered if he had made the lacing strong enough to hold the webs."

"That matter was very thoroughly gone into," said Meade quickly. "It was the very point which I myself had questioned, but father is absolutely confident that we provided latticing enough to take up all the stresses. I looked into that matter myself," he went on with much emphasis.

"I guess it's all right," said Curtiss lightly. "I examined the webs and lacings carefully this afternoon. They seem to be as right as possible."

"Those trusses," said Abbott emphatically, "will stand forever. You need not worry about that."

"Are you going to finish this job on time?" asked Severence, the vice president. "You know the financial end of it is mine, and much depends upon the date of completion."

"That depends upon you people at the shop, doctor. If you get the stuff

It Had Been a Part of His Life.

here to me I'll get it in place in short order," answered Abbott.

"We aren't worrying about anything with you and Meade on the job, Abbott," said the colonel genially.

"Yes, you are, father," said the girl. "Ever since the International has been started you have scarcely been able to give a thought even to me. I'm tired of it. I hope the old thing will soon be finished, so that we can all go back to normal life again."

"I hope so, too," assented the colonel, "and I guess you are right. The fact is the bridge is an obsession with us all. It is the biggest job the Martlet has ever handled. Indeed, it is the biggest thing in the world. It's the longest cantilever, the greatest span, the heaviest trusses, the—"

"I've heard all about it," interrupted the girl, waving him into silence, "ever since you began it. Sometimes I think it's beginning to obsess me, too."

"You don't look like it," whispered Meade, under cover of the general laugh that greeted her remark.

"What do I look like?" she whispered back quickly, in return.

But Meade had no opportunity to tell her.

"It is not exactly a subject for dinner conversation," said the colonel with sudden gravity, "but all of us here, even you, my dear, must realize how much that bridge means to us. I won't go so far as to say that its failure would ruin us, but it would be hard for us to survive."

"Have you ever known anything that my father designed to fail?" asked Meade somewhat hotly.

"No, and that is why we took his plans in spite of—"

"In spite of what, sir?"

"In spite of Curtiss here and some others."

"Mr. Curtiss," said Meade, turning to the chief engineer, "if it will add anything to your peace of mind, I will assume my full share of responsibility for the matter. You know the books by Schmidt-Chemnitz, the great German bridge engineer?"

Curtiss nodded.

"At first I—that is, we—thought that there might possibly be weakness in those compression members, but I checked them with the methods he advocates and then submitted the figures to my father, and then he went through the whole calculation and applied coefficients he felt to be safe."

"I'm willing to take your father's judgment in the matter rather than Schmidt-Chemnitz', or anybody's," said Curtiss, "so successful has been his career."

"Now that I have seen the members in place I have no doubt that they will stand," said the colonel.

"Sure they will," added Abbott with supreme and contagious confidence, an assurance which helped even Meade to believe.

"Of course we all know," said Doctor Severence, who had been long enough in touch with engineering to learn much about it, "that there is always more or less of experimenting in the design of a new thing like this."

"Yes," said the colonel, "but we don't want our experiment to fail in this instance."

"They won't," said the young man boldly.

He had long since persuaded himself that he had been all wrong and his father all right, so that he entered upon his defense and the defense of the bridge with enthusiasm. He was ready to break a lance with anybody on its behalf.

"Well," began the colonel, "we have every confidence in your father and in you. I don't mind telling you, Meade, it need not go any further, that when this bridge is completed we shall be prepared to make you personally a very advantageous offer for future relations with the Martlet company if you care to accept it. On the strength of your probable acceptance we are already planning to venture into certain foreign fields which we have hitherto not felt it to our interest to enter."

"That is most kind of you, Colonel Illingworth," said the young man gratefully, "and it appeals to me very strongly. I have been associated with father latterly. He wants to retire with the completion of this bridge, and before I open any office of my own I should like the advantage of further experience. Such a connection as you propose seems to me to be ideal, from my point of view. No man could have any better backing than the Martlet Bridge company."

"Well, we shall look to you to be worthy of it," said the colonel kindly.

His glance vaguely comprehended his daughter as he spoke. Colonel Illingworth was a very rich man. The Martlet Bridge company was nearest his heart, but he had many other interests. His only daughter would eventually be the mistress of a great fortune. Meade was not poor. Of course, his means were limited compared to Colonel Illingworth's great fortune, but what he had earned, saved, and invested was sufficient—yes, even for two. And he would inherit much more. Old Meade had not been the greatest engineer of his generation for nothing. Independent and self-respecting, young Meade could not be considered a fortune hunter by anybody. He was the kind of man to whom a decent father likes to intrust his daughter. Old Colonel Illingworth found himself gazing wonderingly at the two.

After dinner the men sat out on the observation platform with their cigars and coffee. For those that liked it there was something in tall glasses in which ice tinkled when the glasses were agitated, but Meade declined all three.

"With your permission, sir," he said, "I am going to take Miss Illingworth out on the bridge. The moon is rising and—"

"I have heard so much about it," said the girl, standing by the door. "I want to see it when the workmen are all off and it is all quiet, in the moonlight."

"Very well. You had better change your dress, Helen, before you go," said the colonel, turning to Abbott and engaging him in conversation on technical matters.

"I'll wait for you at the front door of the car," said the engineer, his heart beating like a pneumatic riveter and sounding almost as loud in his ears.

"I won't be long," she whispered as she left him.

Helen did not want to waste time any more than Meade did. So, instead of taking her father's advice, all she did was to cover her beautiful shoulders with a light wrap and hasten to the car door in the shortest possible time. Every moment they were apart, since the sum-total in which they could be together was so small, was a moment lost.

"Now," she said, coming out of the door of the car and descending the steps toward him, eagerly expectant, "I want a prize for my swiftness."

"A prize!" returned the man, "why, you've been gone years, and you haven't even changed your gown. You

They Saw Her Round, Red, Full Face.

can't go out on a bridge in that gown and those slippers, tramping over dirty tracks, piles of steel, rough wooden planks, paint and—"

"Can't I?" she said; "you just see."

"I hate to see you spoil your dress," he said uncertainly as she stopped.

Really what gown on earth was worth half an hour of her society? At least that is the way he felt about it, and evidently she felt the same way.

"It is settled, then," she said, slipping her arm through his as they walked down the long wooden platform near the siding. At the end of the platform, as they turned about the temporary station and storehouse, before them rose the bridge. The moon was rising over the high hills that sprang up from the steep cliffike bank of the other side of the vast river. They saw her round, red, full face through an interlacing tracery of steel The lower part of the bridge was still in deep shadow. Indeed, the moon had just cleared the hills of the opposite bank of the great gorge cut by the broad river flowing swiftly in its darkness far below. At the farther end of the suspended arm extending far over the water the top of the traveler glistened. The cantilever on the opposite shore, incomplete and sunk under a high rise of sand, was still in shadow and not yet discernible.

Unwittingly the woman drew a little near the man. He became more conscious than before of the light touch of her hand upon his arm. It was very still where they stood. The shacks of the workmen had been erected below the bridge about a quarter of a mile to the right along the banks of the little affluent of the main stream. They could hear faint but indistinguishable noises that yet indicated humanity coming from that direction. The fires in the machine house and in the engines were banked. Lazy curls of smoke rose to be blown away in the limitless areas of the upper air. In the darkness all the unsightly evidences of construction work were hidden.

"Oh," said the woman, drawing a long breath, "I don't wonder that you love it. Isn't it beautiful, flung up in the air that way? One would think it wasn't steel but silver and gold and—"

"Time was," said the man, "when I loved a thing like that above everything except my father, but now—"

Young Meade comes out of his dream with a terrific bump—the real story begins with the next installment. Tell your friends to read "Web of Steel," the best serial of the year.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PREPARE MORE LAND --GROW MORE FOOD

"Seed and Feed" the Slogan of the Year.

The papers are filled with the appeal for soldiers, sailors and farmers, and all are timely, all are necessary. The sailor is needed to man the ships that protect the shores, police the seas and clear the ocean of tormenting and meddlesome masked buccaneers, to give help to the allies, to make more efficient the present fighting units that are keeping free the sea lanes and ocean routes. The soldier is required to keep alive and intact the unity of the nation and the freedom of the world, to protect the lives of its citizens from incursions without and raids within, to guard the honor and preserve the dignity of the great United States, to render not only sentimental but practical assistance to those who for two and a half years on the battlefields of Flanders and the steppes of the East have been fighting for the freedom of the world against a dominant autocratic and militarist Prussianism, which, were it to become successful, would mean autocratism, militarism and Prussianism, and a "get-off-the-sidewalkism" over the entire world. The allies are proud to welcome these new necessions to the fighting forces, which mean an earlier termination of the war and the dawn of an era that will be historic, one that we will all be proud that we lived in. Throughout all Canada, Great Britain, France, and all the allied countries, when the news was received that the United States had entered the war, a thrill went up and down the nation's sides, and the pulses throbbed with a new life, keenly appreciative of the practical sentiment that had brought to their sides an ally of the strength and virility of the United States.

But the soldier and the sailor need to be fed, and therefore the cry for agricultural enlistment. The strength of the fighting man must be maintained. In his absence from the field there comes the necessity for provision to take his place. The appeal for farm help is well timed, opportune and important. There are vacant lands aplenty in the United States that, given a fair opportunity under competent advisement and reasonable help, will produce abundantly. Western Canada also provides an excellent field for the prosecution of work in growing wheat and other grains, and while it is not the desire of the Canadian Government to draw from the resources of the United States, believing that it is the duty of every patriotic citizen to do all he possibly can to build up the stores of depleted foods and making use of every energy at home, the wish is to lay before the public the fact that Canada has millions of acres of excellent land capable of producing wonderful crops. If for any reason the reader, having patriotism and a love of his country in his heart, and a desire to forward the cause of the allies, cannot avail himself of the opportunities afforded in the United States, Western Canada will be glad to render him any assistance it can in locating him on its vacant areas, where large crops can be grown at minimum of cost. Let us grow the grain, raise the cattle, produce the food to feed our soldiers, our sailors and provide food for our allies, no matter whether it is done to the North or to the South of the boundary line that in the object in view should not be known as a boundary. Let us keep up the spirit of patriotism, whether it be growing grain in the United States or in Canada, but Canada, fully alive to the necessity, joins in the appeal of its allies—the United States—for more food and more food.—Advertisement.

Even Dirt Is Cheap No Longer.

The expression, "dirt cheap," must be discarded. Blame the war. Winnipeg, Manitoba, florists have announced an increase in the price of earth sold for potting flowers. A year ago earth sold for 50 cents a bushel. Now it costs 25 cents a pail.

Caught.

"Last night I looked through the keyhole into the parlor where sister was with her beau."

"What did you find out?"

"The gas."

Many a man thinks himself a genius because he lives by his wits.